

THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS
CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND,
AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. 1.

March 8, 1935—Adar II, 3, 5695

No. 5

EDITORIALS

A "SUBSTANTIAL" JEW SPEAKS

JEWS IN PROFESSIONS

THE "YELLOW" PERIL

"WIE ES SICH JÜDELT . . ."

MARXISM AND THE JEWISH RELIGION

by Mordecai M. Kaplan

BOOK REVIEW

JUDAISM HOMILETICALLY INTERPRETED, *by Eugene Kohn*

PUBLISHED BY

THE SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM

15 West 86th Street, New York, N. Y.

Have You Read These Three Important Books?

"JUDAISM AS A CIVILIZATION"

by *Mordecai M. Kaplan*

A comprehensive formulation of the philosophy of Jewish life upon which the RECONSTRUCTIONIST is based; a monumental and enduring work. (Price \$5.00)

"THE FUTURE OF JUDAISM IN AMERICA"

by *Eugene Kohn*

A shorter analysis of the problem of Jewish life in America and the program for its reconstruction. (Price \$2.50)

ORDER BLANK

The RECONSTRUCTIONIST
15 West 86th St., New York, N. Y.

I enclose \$..... for which please
send me

- ☐ JUDAISM AS A CIVILIZATION
☐ THE FUTURE OF JUDAISM IN
AMERICA
☐ THE MAKING OF THE MOD-
ERN JEW

NAME

ADDRESS.....

.....

"THE MAKING OF THE MODERN JEW"

by *Milton Steinberg*

A study of the factors in the survival of the Jewish people and of the psychological and sociological aspects of the present day Jewish scene. (Price \$3.00)

THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST

Vol. 1.

March 8, 1935—Adar II, 3, 5695

No. 5

EDITORIAL BOARD

MORDECAI M. KAPLAN, *Chairman*

BEN ZION BOKSER

ISRAEL S. CHIPKIN

IRA EISENSTEIN

ISRAEL GOLDSTEIN

EUGENE KOHN

LEON S. LANG

MILTON STEINBERG

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

BARNETT R. BRICKNER

ALEXANDER M. DUSHKIN

JACOB S. GOLUB

EDWARD L. ISRAEL

MAX KADUSHIN

THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST is published bi-weekly from September to June by the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, 15 West 86th St., New York, N. Y. Subscription \$1.00 a year; foreign \$1.25; individual copy 10 cents. Entered as second class matter January 9, 1935, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

EDITORIALS

A "Substantial" Jew Speaks

JUDGE J. M. PROSKAUER in an interview recently in the *New York World-Telegram* denounced the boycott as an instance of fighting Hitler with "Hitlerism," and declared that the first duty of Jews in this country is to be loyal and patriotic. His statement is a vicious aspersion on those Jews who are supporting the boycott. He implies that they are poor Americans, hyphenated and unpatriotic. This quite gratuitous slur on sympathizers with the boycott is all the more objectionable because of the insistence of Mr. Proskauer that his Americanism is of a better brand than theirs. He is too good a patriot to allow his Jewishness to impair his civic integrity.

Such an attitude is worse than complacent self-righteousness. In order to put himself in the most favorable light before the Gentile world Mr. Proskauer does not hesitate to impugn the patriotism of millions of his fellow Jews.

The Talmud has a phrase for it—*hamiskabed bikelon havero*—he who elevates himself through the deprecation of another. Does he not suggest the medieval *moser*, or informer, as he ostentatiously draws in his skirts from contamination, and points out to non-Jews that he at least is not defiled by the plague of un-Americanism which he implies has infected so many Jews? Does not Mr. Proskauer resemble Herr Naumann of the "German Citizens of the Mosaic Persuasion," who keeps on protesting that *he* and *his* followers are patriotic Germans, and that the other German Jews are so unpatriotic as to deserve everything they get from the Nazis?

Mr. Proskauer's argument is more than a little disingenuous. He insists that Judaism is only a religion, and very curiously indeed advocates that American Jews "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." Thus he not only quotes the wrong Testament—a sad slip for a Jewish religionist—but he quotes approvingly a passage against which Jewish religious tradition has always protested. If Mr. Proskauer knew his religion better he would know that Judaism has never consigned this world to Caesar and left only the next to God, that it has always insisted that Caesar too obey God's law.

Neither Americanism nor religion explains Mr. Proskauer. He gives himself away when he says that he speaks for "the substantial part of American Jewry." We think we know whom he means. There is among American Jews a body of men of wealth and position who are worried lest the Jewish prob-

lem affect them adversely. For that reason, they protest their Americanism from the housetops, therefore they would like to keep Jewish issues from becoming too conspicuous. This accounts for their attempts to dissociate themselves publicly from the main bodies of Jewry—an action by which they hope to show that they are “different.” Though they are often quite irreligious themselves, they insist that they are Jews only by religion. Yes, Judge Proskauer has given his case away. He speaks for these substantial Jews, for those wealthy, distinguished individuals who tremble for the security of their position, who want Judaism and the Jewish problem hushed, who cry “Peace, Peace” because it sounds good before the Gentile world—though they know there is no peace.

Judge Proskauer is no judge in this case. He has not thought clearly as a judge should. And he stands before the bar of Jewish public opinion not as an impartial arbiter, but as a special pleader for substantial Jews who represent special interests, and who are more concerned over them than over Judaism or Jews.

Jews in Professions

JEWES are overcrowding the professions, especially law and medicine. The result is fierce competition among the members of the profession, more fuel for the kind of anti-Semitism that is nourished by jealousy, and the virtual exclusion from the professions of those who are now preparing themselves for a career. What shall be done to relieve the situation?

Several physicians have expressed themselves in favor of the *numerus clausus*, as the only effective means of diverting Jews into other channels of activity. It is only fair, they say, that universities subsidized privately should be entitled to select their students from any group they prefer. Indeed, the quota system has worked havoc with European Jewry; but the advo-

cates of the *numerus clausus* have a perfect faith that in America the system will be effected with justice and fairness, and the Jews will be admitted to the universities in proportion to their numbers in the population.

We believe that American Jewry should be unalterably opposed to the *numerus clausus*, for it is in direct violation of the basic principle, that all citizens be given equal opportunity. Privately endowed universities are chartered by the various states, and accept contributions from any source. To countenance the principle of credal, racial, religious or national distinctions in the selection of students in these universities would be bringing us only one short step from the introduction of such distinctions into the whole range of the economic structure, into the civil service, and into politics. We have a constitution? Yes, so did Germany.

The problem remains: how shall we relieve crowding in the professions? We believe that we should see the problem as a Jewish problem, and proceed to think of a solution in terms of Jewish life. Instead of permitting, nay encouraging, the imposition of a solution from without, in the form of discriminatory restrictions set up by the universities, we should attempt to educate our own people in the nature and seriousness of the situation. This would involve a thoroughgoing study of the facts, the creation of a system of vocational guidance, and the establishment of agencies to facilitate the dissemination of vital information to the growing generation of Jews.

Who can undertake such a task? Only an *organized Jewish community*. The individual congregation cannot; the lodge, the club, the philanthropic society are in no position to engage the staff of experts and research people for such an enterprise. Unless and until American Jewry is organized on a communal basis, we shall continue to reach out to wholly inadequate or wholly bad proposals.

The "Yellow" Peril

WE commend wholeheartedly the move made by the National Education Association to expose William Randolph Hearst for the menace that he is to the academic life of America. In the course of his long career, Mr. Hearst has invaded other fields, with disastrous consequences. As the press agent for chauvinism, militarism, and now fascism, Mr. Hearst has fully merited Professor Charles A. Beard's description of him as "an enemy of everything that is noblest and best in our American tradition."

But nowhere have his labors been fraught with greater danger than in the field of education. Alarmed by the pressure for social reconstruction coming particularly from academic circles, he has inaugurated a campaign of terror against all liberal teachers in our schools and colleges. At New York University and at the universities of Syracuse and Columbia, Hearst's spies have sought the evidence on which a number of the professors in question might be incriminated as un-'patriotic'. The Ives law, which requires an oath of allegiance to the constitution from all instructors in New York State schools, was inspired by the Hearst press. And the Hearst press is now agitating for the Nunan bill which would require a similar oath from students.

Mr. Hearst promises to continue his crusade until our schools are purged of every vestige of 'radicalism'—he, of course, to decide what radicalism is and what it isn't. As Professor Beard remarked in his address before the Education Association, "Unless those who represent American scholarship, science and the right of a free people to discuss public questions freely stand together against his insidious influences, he will annihilate them individually by every method known to yellow journalism."

The measures of defense proposed by the Education Association include, among other things, the formation of a nationwide organization of teachers, clergymen and newspaper editors to safeguard the freedom of the press and of discussion. Unquestionably, an enlightened public opinion can defeat Mr. Hearst. It will now be up to the champions of a free academic life in America to enlighten our public opinion. We trust that Jewish religious leaders, and Jewish teachers will appreciate the importance of the campaign, and make their contribution to it.

"Wie es sich jüdeln . . ."

THIS is no mistake, Heine, to the contrary, notwithstanding. Sometimes tables are turned. But before we come to speak of what has happened, we ought to know what irritated Heine into making that snappish quip: "*Wie es sich christelt, so jüdeln es sich*," which, translated freely, means that even in their Judaism Jews ape their Christian neighbors. As a rule, this is a correct description of the way Jews usually act. One need only observe the entire development of Reformist Judaism to note how closely modeled it is on Protestant Christianity. It could never have arisen either in Greek-Orthodox Russia or in Catholic France. On the other hand, the neo-Orthodoxy of Samson Raphael Hirsch found itself at home in Catholic South Germany.

This tendency is understandable and not at all blameworthy, as Heine seems to assume. Why should the Jews be expected to be impervious to cultural and spiritual influences emanating from Christianity? Is it not to the credit of a people to learn and absorb from civilizations and religions of other peoples rather than to become ingrown? We are grateful to Judah ha-Levi for having judaized Ghazoli's Mohammedan theology. Why, then, balk at judaizing Hocking's or Royce's Christian theology? One is always in the wrong with cynics

and paradox mongers. Heine who was a convert to Christianity objects to his fellow Jews' aping it. He himself deserted Judaism for Western civilization, and yet he romanticized about the Jewish life which was insulated against anything Western.

But if we are to find fault with our people, it is that they are afraid of viewing their own group life in terms which emanate from their own experience. In their haste to make themselves understood, they often misrepresent themselves and make themselves out to be other than what they really are. In ancient times the Romans couldn't make out what the Jews were. Josephus and other Romanizing Jews, in their eagerness to persuade their Roman friends what good Romans the Jews could be, thought they helped matters by describing the Jews as a philosophic sect, like the Stoics. This only maddened the Stoics, and they—in the person of Apion—went hammer and tongs after the Jews for daring to compare themselves with them.

In our day, when the Christians are as puzzled about us as were the Romans, we have rendered confusion worse confounded by telling them that what makes us a group is a common religion. They know very well that only twenty-five per cent of our people in this country ever attend services, and that within that number we have the whole gamut from the crassest theurgy to prayerless humanism. And yet when it is suggested that before we try to

make ourselves understood to our neighbors we first come to understand ourselves, and that if we were to do so we would inevitably arrive at the conclusion that what unites us is a common civilization, the changing, evolving civilization of the Jewish people, a hue and a cry is raised: Judaism is being secularized! Judaism is being ghettoized!

Perhaps these protests will subside, if their authors will learn what is happening in the Christian world. The Christians—especially the Protestants—are trying to orient themselves to the changing order. A group of the leading minds among them have undertaken to think their position through. They are planning to issue a quarterly to be called "Christendom." In the statement explaining their program there occur these words: "Christianity is itself nothing less than a civilization. . . . The scope of Christian interest includes also art, science, ethics, politics, economics, philosophy and public affairs—every domain of human culture." For once Jews did not wait to define themselves in terms familiar to their neighbors, but their neighbors are defining themselves in terms which Jews have arrived at for themselves and their neighbors. By the same token that we have declared Judaism to be a civilization, we have maintained that Christianity is also a civilization. For once "*Wie es sich jüdet, so christelt es sich.*"

Marxism and the Jewish Religion

By MORDECAI M. KAPLAN

Introduction

IN the past, whenever the Jewish religion was challenged, an attempt was made to meet the challenge. In the very process of countering an attack, it acquired new strength. After each

conflict with opposing beliefs and social tendencies, the Jewish religion came forth not only more self-confident, but also enhanced ethically and spiritually. While engaged in combating alien ways and teachings, it discovered and somehow managed to assimilate their ele-

ments of strength and plausibility. The fact contributed to its enhancement and development.

During the first six hundred years of its existence, when the Jewish religion was still in its formative stage, it was engaged in a relentless struggle against the religion of the natives. Canaanism consisted of the kind of nature worship that gave no promise of ever getting beyond magic or theurgy in its conception of the divine, or of ever identifying the divine will with the ethical aspect of human relationships. The adherents of YHWH combated with all their vigor the corrupting and anti-social tendencies of the Canaanite religion. But the latter possessed many folk customs and ritual observances which afforded an opportunity for religious self-expression. These the Jewish religion unconsciously adopted and transfigured by means of the spiritual interpretation it gave to them.

The next challenge was that of Hellenism. Judaism met Hellenism on two fronts, in Palestine and in Alexandria. There can be no doubt that the urge to universalism, though already evident in some of the anonymous prophecies in the Bible, became then a confirmed characteristic of Judaism. Mainly as a result of its conflict with Hellenism, Judaism went forth with the conscious mission of converting the world. This is seen clearly in the literary and philosophic efforts of Alexandrian Jews to persuade the pagan world by means of the written word to give up its idolatries.

In Palestine the Maccabean struggle marks a new epoch in the history of the Jewish people and of mankind. Before the Maccabean struggle the tide of civilization flowed from West to East; thereafter it flowed from East to West. The widening of the social and intellectual horizon of the Jewish people led to the conviction that the Torah had a message for all peoples and resulted in Torah quite literally going forth from Zion to influence the spiritual life of the whole western world.

Beginning with the ninth century of the common era, Judaism encountered the challenge of Greek philosophy in the garb of Arabian culture. The outcome was a long line of Jewish philosophers whose works constitute the element of rationalism by which Judaism has since become enriched. Those works have usually been appealed to in modern times when the challenge to traditional Jewish religion has come from science. The arguments of medieval Jewish rationalism were brought forth again during the nineteenth century by those Jews who, feeling the impact of modern scientific thought, wanted to be convinced of the validity of the Jewish religion. Even Jews who no longer find the arguments of medieval philosophers convincing find their example encouraging. The boldness and intellectual integrity of these philosophers in reconstructing the God idea of tradition to conform to the knowledge and experience of their age is an inspiration to clear and independent thinking. They liberated later generations from the fear that free inquiry might overthrow the foundations of faith on which man depends for his salvation. Medieval rationalism therefore serves as another illustration of how the challenge to Judaism of opposing philosophies may serve to enhance its value.

It is therefore surprising that the most recent challenge and perhaps the most dangerous that the Jewish religion has encountered, should have been allowed for so long a time to remain unanswered. I refer to what evidently constitutes the greatest menace to the Jewish religion, namely, the challenge Marxism.

I.

The substance of the indictment against religion, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, is that it has functioned as an opiate. It is said to have served as a means of drugging the exploited and oppressed classes with beliefs that have

rendered them insensate to the true cause of their suffering. The teachings of religion have bereft them of whatever energy they might have exerted to throw off their master's yoke. Those teachings, it is alleged, have sought to influence the masses to accept their fate with resignation, and to look forward to life in a transcendental world to compensate them for the ills they endured in this world. This is how religion came to be used by the vested interests and their satellites, the clergy, as a means of upholding the status quo, and forestalling the possible awakening of the proletariat to a realization of their own power. The seriousness of this challenge is evidenced not so much by the official attitude of the Communist regime in Russia as by the ruthless antagonism toward the Jewish religion on the part of the Jewish Communists both in Russia and in America.

There are two ways in which people react to challenge. The impulsive way is to deny all charges against them, to let their "defense mechanism" array every specious argument it can command to prove that the charge is malicious and false, and to make countercharges against their opponents. That is the way most religionists respond to the charge that religion is on the side of social reaction. They quote slogans from religious literature to show that religion is on the side of the poor and the oppressed and they castigate the Communists as a malevolent mob impelled by envy and covetousness to seize the wealth that others have built up by industry and intelligence. In so doing they only convince their opponents the more of the truth of their accusations against religion. The wise way to meet criticism is not to prove it false but to find out to what extent it is true. Even if the charge be erroneous, it would never have been made without some circumstance having occasioned it. This must then be examined objectively, and any evil that is found to be responsible for the accu-

sation must be removed. Only thus can the rebuke even of an enemy be turned to one's advantage, and the rebuke of a friend contribute to solidifying one's friendship.

II.

The only way in which it is possible for the Jewish religion to be understood aright, especially in relation to the challenge of Marxism, is to eradicate the notion of it as fixed and static, as committed to one particular form—the form in which it was transmitted to us. To be sure, the form in which the Jewish religion has come down to us is essentially other-worldly. The traditional outlook implied that it was useless to try to improve the world we live in; when the time would be ripe, God would bring about the millenium. In fact, the attempt to change conditions came to be considered as a sin, the sin of "unduly precipitating the end." In traditional religion the only answer to the problem of poverty was charity. People were to be persuaded by their knowledge of what was pleasing to God to share their wealth with the less fortunate, and they were induced to do so with the thought that such activity would be rewarded in the world to come. One can readily understand that such ideas as these make for the preservation of the status quo rather than for its modification, and if these ideas were essential to Jewish religion, and the Jewish religion inconceivable without them, we would be unable to justify it against the attacks of anti-religious radicals.

Religionists often lose their case by overstating it. In response to the claim that religion is evil, in that it has contributed to the perpetuation of conditions making for economic exploitation and class and international warfare, religionists affirm that religion is an unmixed blessing and repudiate the evils that radicals lay at its doors. These evils they attribute to the corruption of hu-

man nature. They conceive of them as having happened in spite of religion rather than because of it. This is a begging of the question. If in the name of religion people can commit injustice or suffer its continuance, there is something wrong with such religion. The justification of religion is not that it is always right and good, but that it is necessary, that it answers a human need and is indispensable. It is a human institution, like the family, or the state, or the school system. None of these institutions is infallible. Every one of them has resulted in much harm. But their abuse does not justify their destruction; it only necessitates their reconstruction. Surely the Communists have their grievances against the state, but they do not mean to dispense with the state if they should get into power. Their purpose is rather to set up a state that shall further their social objectives. Before deciding to oppose religion they should similarly have inquired into the possibility of revolutionizing religion to make it a force that would aid their social objectives. That they did not even think of such a possibility is doubtless due to the fact that the religion with which they were familiar conceived itself as a perfect and final revelation which had to be accepted or rejected as a whole, and which, being supernatural in origin, did not even seek validation on the basis of its contribution to human welfare. But it must be remembered that while this idea prevailed among Jews during the last two thousand years, it does not represent either the first or the last word of the Jewish religion. It marks one particular stage into which historical conditions introduced it, and out of which changes in our day are leading it.

During this stage the Jewish religion acted as an opiate. But then practically the entire Jewish people was struggling as a class against their conquerors and oppressors, the non-Jews, and it was their sufferings that it alleviated. There are times when an opiate is necessary.

That is the case when no way to a radical cure is in sight and the patient is in danger of succumbing to his agonies. Such was the situation in which the Jews were until our day. In fact, a radical solution of the problem of economic exploitation in general could not have been applied before human inventiveness had created those machines that so immeasurably enhanced the productive capacity of man and made possible the economy of abundance. But now that a more radical cure for the social ills not only of the Jews but of all the downtrodden and oppressed is possible and attainable, the function of the Jewish religion must be that of a stimulant to energize the Jew as a participant in the cause of a better and juster world order in the here and the now.

In order that the Jewish religion come to function in this capacity, it is necessary for the Jews to achieve a completely new orientation toward it. They must learn to know its history and evolution. They cannot accept on faith versions of the origin of the Jewish religion which take no cognizance of the results of historical research into facts utterly unknown to those who, with the help of their imagination, constructed the traditional account. These ancient historians had to rely on folk-legends and the meager records then available. They lacked the very concept of history as the evolution of society. Their version of history is therefore an imaginative reconstruction of the past designed to validate their faith in the divine origin of the institutions which they held in reverence. To understand what the Jewish religion may mean in our day, Jews must become familiar, as they never have been, with the story of its actual beginnings. The picture of its origin as presented by tradition is not only out of keeping with our other ideas about the world of nature and human society, but it stands in the way of the Jew's ever coming to terms with the realities and the problems that confront him. Instead of that picture, he must learn to think

of the rise and development of the Jewish religion in accordance with what have become the common-place of modern biblical science and historical realism.

III.

According to that account, the Israelites entered Canaan as a federation of tribes united by allegiance to YHWH, the deity of the Sinai region. They no sooner entered the land than the struggle began between those who were inclined to adopt the native civilization and worship and those who adhered to the simple manners and worship of the nomad life. Almost invariably the wealthy and ruling class, those who lived in the towns and engaged in commerce, were inclined to become canaanized. The peasant and shepherd classes adhered to the YHWH cult and *mishpat*. As they were compelled to bear the burdens imposed by government and were exploited in other ways, there arose among them men who protested.

The nabi was the preacher or propagandist who identified the oppression and corruption with the disloyalty to YHWH and the violation of his *mishpat*. *Mishpat* was YHWH's system of law that was intended to prevent the concentration of landed property in the hands of the nobles, the exploitation of tenant labor, and the foreclosing of mortgages. Thus, in the book of Kings, the prophet Samuel is represented in retrospect as warning the people against the institution of monarchy by describing the treatment which the people might expect of their king, as follows:

"And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your maid-servants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work."

(1 Sam. 8, 14-16)

Elijah condemned King Ahab for seizing the land of Naboth.

"And thou shalt speak unto him, saying: Thus saith the Lord: Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? and thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord: In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. And Ahab said to Elijah: Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered: I have found thee; because thou hast given thyself over to do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord."

(1 K. 21, 19-20)

Micah and Isaiah condemned the ruling class for adding house to house, and field to field.

"Woe to them that devise iniquity
And work evil upon their beds!
When the morning is light, they execute it,
Because it is in the power of their hand.
And they covet fields, and seize them;
And houses, and take them away;
Thus they oppress a man and his house,
Even a man and his heritage."

(Micah 2, 1-2)

"Woe unto them that join house to house,
That lay field to field,
Till there be no room, and ye be made to dwell
Alone in the midst of the land!"

(Isaiah 5, 8)

"The Lord will enter into judgment
With the elders of his people, and the
princes thereof:

'It is ye that have eaten up the vineyard;

The spoil of the poor is in your houses;
What mean ye that ye crush my people,
And grind the face of the poor?"

Saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts."

(Isaiah 3, 14-15)

YHWH was to them the god of *mishpat*, or, as we would term it, social righteousness. Their passion for righteousness was such that this attribute of YHWH became for them the very criterion of godhood. The other beings whom the Canaanites and the surrounding nations worshiped might exist, but they were not worthy of worship; they were not gods. There thus dawned in the minds of the prophets the conviction that other nations would in time repudiate their own gods as unworthy of worship and turn to the God of Israel.

The activity of the canonical prophets cannot be understood except in the light of the imperialistic campaigns of Assyria, Egypt and Babylon. They realized

what those campaigns meant for their people. They deprecated the political alliances and intrigues by which the ruling classes hoped to ward off the impending danger. They urged a return to YHWH and his *mishpat*. Else the hoped-for Day of YHWH would spell the doom of Israel.

The Day of YHWH had been popularly regarded as the day of national triumph for Israel. But the prophets interpreted it as a day of national disaster. Only through such disaster, the prophets proclaimed, would YHWH and his *mishpat* be vindicated. This was their dialectic based upon their conception of YHWH as a god of justice. It thus became the spearhead of their message.

"Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord!

Wherefore would ye have the day of the Lord?

It is darkness, and not light."

(Amos 5, 18)

"For the Lord of hosts hath a day
Upon all that is proud and lofty,
And upon all that is lifted up, and it
shall be brought low;
And the loftiness of man shall be bowed
down,
And the haughtiness of men shall be
brought low;
And the Lord alone shall be exalted in
that day."

(Isaiah 2, 12, 17)

The prophets assumed that the downfall of the state and the accompanying social devastation and exile of the people would be followed by a new and just social order to which the worthy remainder would belong.

"And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written unto life in Jerusalem; when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof, by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of destruction."

(Isaiah 4, 3-4)

The prophets were thus the heralds of social upheaval and catastrophe as a prelude to a better world order. Their mission was to utter warning so that those who would give heed might escape the evil day.

Their teachings finally took root. Their followers grew in number. Among them were many priests of YHWH who had in their keeping YHWH's *torot* (legal precedents and codes in the making). During the intervals of respite, but especially after the ravages of war and captivity had confirmed the warnings of the prophets, their followers undertook to organize the life of the Jewish people on the basis of YHWH's *torot* and *mishpat*. During the three centuries following the destruction of the first Temple, the religion of the Jews, as we know it, was crystallized.

But the better world which the prophets had foretold as bound to come after the social disaster ensued did not materialize. Since the prophets could not be regarded as having been mistaken, their teaching was reinterpreted to mean that nothing less than a world cataclysm was to be the prelude to an entirely new world order. It is only with these beliefs as a background that we can understand the career of the Jewish religion during the last two or three centuries of the second commonwealth, and that we can appreciate the significance of the eschatological ideas which are found in the Apocrypha and other non-canonical books, and later the part played by Jesus.

As the world cataclysm failed to materialize, it was reinterpreted into the belief that an other-world would finally be ushered in by God. Then the righteous would receive their rewards. Religion thus became other-worldly. That resulted in passive resignation to the status quo.

Immortality and a life of bliss in the hereafter became the goal that obsessed the consciousness of man, who, finding himself helpless in the face of the limitations that hedged him about and yet driven to surmount them, brooded on the glories in the world to come that would compensate for his distress and frustration in this world. The human body which was the seat of all these frustrated desires became to him the

source of that evil which corrupted the very nature of the things about him. He therefore concluded that the achievement of salvation was contingent upon his suppressing those desires and treating their sources as in need of mortification so that its influence for evil might be reduced to a minimum. All this helped to divert man from the problem of so modifying this life as to make it livable.

IV.

The European Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries marks the discovery of the human being as a self-active agent, as the source of those very tendencies whereby he is enabled to change his environment. It was the awakening of the human mind to the realization that man was not to play the part of a passive instrument but of a co-creator with God in the shaping of his world. The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century went further in drawing the implication of that awakening. The Deists and the Encyclopedists taught that man's salvation lay in the here and the now. The political revolutions which marked the end of feudalism and the advent of political freedom were the result.

But there were many thinkers who realized the superficial character of the political revolution. They maintained that political revolution had failed to secure for each individual the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Such right, they said, was formal and empty unless radical changes take place in the economic principles and arrangements upon which our social order was based. These men attacked the principle of private property as the source of all social ills; they held that labor was the only title to property. Thus arose Socialism.

Then came Karl Marx and formulated the theory and practice of social revolution. He substituted what he called a scientific socialism for utopian socialism. Utopian socialism he claims

was impotent. It could go on preaching the principles of justice and equality to doomsday without making the slightest dent on the social order. The reason for its impotence was that it was ignorant of the way in which the social forces operated. This ignorance led to the fallacy that the political revolutions had come about as a result of enlightenment, the teachings of a Rousseau and a Voltaire, and that in order to complete the work of that revolution all that was necessary was to extend the enlightenment to the facts of the economic aspect of human life.

The way to effect the social revolution, according to Marx, is to arrive at a scientific understanding of the forces that move society, and on the basis of that knowledge to develop the proper technique of revolution. Such a scientific understanding leads to the conclusion that the economic factor, the means of subsistence, determines the structure, the events, the culture and the ideals of society. Accordingly, the political revolutions were not the result of eighteenth century enlightenment, but of the growth in opportunities for production and wealth which rendered the social framework and outlook of feudal society obsolete. The political revolutions marked the culmination of the rebellion of the middle classes against the feudal system which had kept them down. They were fought in the interests of the new owning class, which commerce and machine industry had brought to the fore.

It is therefore sheer folly to view the changes in the economic structure of society as merely the continuance of the political revolutions which had brought representative government into the world, and as capable of being effected through the agencies and institutions of representative government. Those whose interests and sympathies lie with the propertied class that brought about the political revolutions which overthrew feudalism and established capitalism cannot be de-

pended upon to overthrow capitalism and establish Socialism. Having fought for the unlimited right of private ownership they naturally would seek to retain their gains. Private property has become sacrosanct to them. Only the propertyless, the proletarian class, can be relied on to bring about the establishment of the social commonwealth. Hence the technique of social revolution consists not in appealing to the sense of justice and ideal of equality in the hearts of the middle class, but in rallying those who own nothing—whose number is bound to increase with the development of machinery—and making them class conscious. They will then wrest the instruments of production and the natural resources. This cannot, and will not be accomplished without resort to violence.

V.

The foregoing analysis makes it clear that at bottom Socialism represents a revival on a large scale of the struggle against cruelty, oppression and exploitation, based on an appeal to the ethical and spiritual values. Like prophecy of old, it emphasizes the truth that it is in and through the economic aspect of human life that its morality and spirituality must find their basic expression. It appreciates fully the extent to which human personality is outraged, and the full and free development of life made impossible, by the unjust distribution of wealth.

Marxism, on the other hand, so interprets the whole course of the economic struggle that it sees little in common between any of the past struggles against exploitation and the one which the proletariat must wage in our day. Machine industry has introduced new factors into the economic situation, and it is only in the light of these factors that the entire significance of what is happening and what must be done to wrest the power from the few is to be determined. This is an attempt to

eliminate all ideal considerations from the struggle for a better world order. Marxism wants to make it appear that only the method of production and the economic implications bound up with it are all that count. This is the philosophy of economic determinism.

Such a philosophy is untenable by all the canons of logic. Its interpretation of history is too simple to embrace all the facts. It makes the mistake of assuming that because a cause is indispensable for producing a particular effect, it is solely responsible for that effect. If people travel by automobile, gasoline is an indispensable cause of bringing them to their destination! This does not mean, however, that the gasoline is solely responsible for bringing them there. It may be that their desire to do business there also played a part. Similarly the fact that economic factors condition the course of history does not mean that they by themselves are adequate to account for all historic phenomena. The economic needs of man are basic, but man is not a mere economic animal. The fact that economic motives play a necessary part in human conduct does not mean that they are the only motives that determine his social behavior and need to be invoked to effect social change.

The actual contribution of both Socialism and Marxism must be seen in terms of the idea that has been basic to modern enlightenment, namely, that it is only as man will apply his own powers of intelligence to the social relationships which refer to goods and services will a better world arise. Both of them indict the modern industrial order. Both of them call upon man to give up the notion of waiting passively for some providential recreation of the world. Both of them insist that it is entirely up to man so to reconstruct this world as to convert it from the hell that it is to a veritable paradise.

If the Jewish religion wants to play a part in the life of the Jews of the future, it must say "yea" to this interpretation of the world to come. It must deliber-

ately renounce the view that the salvation of human life is to be secured through passive waiting. It must make a virtue of "precipitating the end." It must take up once more the cudgels for the oppressed. It must recapture the mood of the prophetic stage of its career. When I say it must do so, I mean that those who teach and preach it must realize that they cannot afford to give the impression that the Jewish religion can continue in the form in which it has been handed down. They must have the courage to readjust it to fit the newer needs of the day. They must welcome in all forms of social idealism the challenge that will force the Jewish religion to revert to the original prophetic impulse which gave it birth.

VI.

But of what interest is it to social idealism whether the Jewish religion survive or perish? The answer is that any idealism which can draw inspiration from history is thereby validated and reenforced. Even Marxism leans upon history in its very claim that nothing but the method of production counts. It is a social idealism though it deprecates the very term ideal. If the clash of interest alone is necessary to precipitate and carry through the social revolution, why did Marx labor so painstakingly to perfect his demonstration that all history is economically determined? He might have spared himself the pains. His laborious literary labors added no new economic factor to those that already were operative. Yet it would be absurd to deny to the doctrines of Marx any efficacious influence in producing the Russian revolution.

Nor does it conform to the facts of history to assume that such doctrines can never come from any but those who have an economic interest in the revolution. Radicals like Tolstoy and Kropotkin who in their day contributed much to the ferment of revolutionary thought belonged to the very classes that

the revolution which they projected sought to overthrow. In deprecating all ideals as mere "rationalizations" of class interests, the modern radical is rejecting a weapon that has proved itself potent in past struggles for the liberation of the oppressed.

The fact that our thinking is conditioned by the actual circumstances of life, and pre-eminently by its economic circumstances, does not mean that such thinking is useless. Intellect, imagination and social sentiment are organic functions of the social organism that can and must be applied to changing the conditions of life. But this means recognizing the validity of ideals and according to them a place in the cosmic process by which society is evolved.

We have shown the part that this intuition of the cosmic importance of ideals played in the evolution of Jewish religion. The very term God is the symbol of our faith that our ideals are themselves part of the creative forces at work in the universe, revelations of the divine meaning of human life, prophecies of human destiny. Why then should the social idealists among the Jews play the vandals and deliberately destroy the social energy latent in a true understanding of the past of the Jewish religion and of its potentialities for the future?

At the basis of all social reconstruction is the principle of enlightenment which places upon man's initiative and intelligence the burden of world transformation. Socialism confines the application of this principle to the process of ushering in the better world order. Marxism goes a step further and applies the principle of initiative also to the cataclysm which is to be a prelude to the better world order. It maintains that if there is ever to be a more livable world, it will come about only when men have the courage and the ability to initiate the cataclysm. It is man himself that must institute a Day of Judgment upon the corruptions and crimes of the present world order.

The protagonists of Jewish religion should realize that it must identify its conception of God with the powers of human intelligence that make for a better and happier world. The Jewish protagonists of social idealism should realize that the Jewish religion came into being as the result of the first attempt to conceive of God as the defender of the

weak against the strong, and that it can therefore continue to serve as the inspiration in the present struggle against oppression and exploitation. There would then come about a rapprochement between two streams of social energy. Every such rapprochement helps to bring mankind nearer to its goal.

BOOK REVIEW

Judaism Homiletically Interpreted

JUDAISM, AN ANALYSIS AND AN INTERPRETATION, Israel H. Levinthal; Funk and Wagnalls, New York, 1935.

DR. LEVINTHAL states in the preface of his book that it embodies "an almost literal rendition of a series of lectures delivered at the Friday night services of the Brooklyn Jewish Center." It hardly required such a statement to enable the reader to detect that the book is essentially homiletic in character, that it belongs to the type of edifying literature which seeks to restate, in beautiful language and with interesting references to sacred literature, ideals and concepts to which the audience as well as the preacher are committed in advance. But the subtitle of the book, "An Analysis and an Interpretation," leads one to expect another than homiletic approach to the problem of Judaism, one that is characterized by a more close-knit logic and a more realistic awareness of the difficulties that confront the modern Jew in adjusting himself to his traditional heritage. In both these respects Dr. Levinthal's book is found wanting.

Let us give but one specimen chosen almost at random to illustrate the faulty logic of the book. In the chapter, "Is Judaism in Conflict with Science?", Dr. Levinthal makes what

appears a very candid concession to the modern spirit by admitting that the Bible conflicts with evolution and that nevertheless, evolution can be accepted. He would not, however, concede that evolution is in conflict with traditional Judaism; so he affirms that Torah is a broader concept than Bible, one that in fact includes the "entire literature of Israel," and that evolution is not in conflict with Torah. This doctrine is supposed to make us all happy. The modernist is expected to rejoice that he can be an evolutionist without being branded as a heretic, and the traditionalist is expected to be glad that he can believe in the revelation of the Torah without thereby stamping himself as an obscurantist. But we can readily imagine hardheaded logicians on both sides of the controversy looking upon this method of harmonization as an evasion rather than a solution of the problem. The modernist will say: if anything that a Jew writes is Torah, even if it contradicts the Bible, what is there sacred in the Torah? why attach religious importance to it? On the other hand, the logical traditionalist will argue: if the Bible is the word of God, as Jewish tradition has always maintained, and if evolution contradicts it, then evolution cannot be in harmony with Torah, for the oral Torah as well as the written is the word of God and one cannot contradict the other. From either point of view it is apparent that the author did not en-

visage the logical implication of his statements.

As a specimen of the lack of realism of the author and his unawareness of the psychological reactions of those Jews who have been alienated from Jewish tradition, we may cite part of his discussion of the attitude of Judaism to labor. He quotes passages of Biblical and rabbinic literature extolling labor and commending it as a virtue. But he does not seem to realize that, from the point of view of labor's critique of religion, such passages may be construed in the very opposite way from that in which he would have us interpret them. Their significance might easily be interpreted as an "opiate" administered to the working class in order to make them contented with their lot as workers, thus making the leisure class more secure in the enjoyment of their leisure. To pursue the author's own method, we might refer to the Midrash which tells us that, when Pharaoh first imposed on our fathers the work of brick-making, he himself labored for a day along with the rest. They were so inspired by this example that they produced an enormous number of bricks. He then, like

a good efficiency engineer, ordered that they produce the same tally of bricks daily. After all, praise is a cheaper form of remuneration than restoring to labor the wealth it has itself produced. Nor does the author seem aware of the irony of commending work as a special human prerogative in an age when the machinery of production denies to millions of men the very opportunity to exercise this prerogative. Not that we would associate ourselves with labor's critique of Judaism. We agree with Dr. Levinthal, that in the past, when the Jewish people exercised an autonomous control of their social life, Judaism was on the whole sensitive to the needs and interests of the worker. But the arguments he advances as proof will probably convince only those who do not need to be convinced.

Despite these defects, the book is a very readable exposition of traditional ideas on the subjects which it discusses. If only as an anthology of Biblical and rabbinic passages on these themes it is an interesting contribution to the Jewish literature available in the English language. We believe that it will find many appreciative readers.

EUGENE KOHN.

Subscription Blank

The RECONSTRUCTIONIST

15 West 86 St., N. Y.

Enclosed is \$1.00 for a year's subscription.

Name

Address

.....